

STORY OF THE SINAI CAMPAIGN

"Operation Kadesh"

LEO HEIMAN

THE truck that gave us a lift back to Nitsana was loaded with hundreds of wood saws and thousands of cans of anti-freeze—all of it made in Russia and captured from the Egyptians. I asked the driver about them. "Oh, that," he laughed. "I loaded them at Abu Aweigila. The storehouses there are lousy with saws, anti-freeze, and woolen underwear, but don't ask me why." Later, the master sergeant in charge of stores at Abu Aweigila explained that the Egyptians must have got their Soviet tanks complete with everything that went into Russian toolboxes, not excepting the wood saws and anti-freeze that were so preposterously useless in the hot and treeless Middle East. The Israeli army would probably sell the wood saws to the Jewish National Fund—the sergeant said—for use in its forestry program.

Nor were saws and anti-freeze all that the Israeli army found in Sinai. Innumerable blankets, towels, bedsheets, and handkerchiefs were piled in underground warehouses at the Egyptian army's main depot in Abu Aweigila and elsewhere, together with candles, woolen underwear, defrosting equipment, heating units, and cans of anti-frostbite salve. The why and wherefore of all this stuff will probably remain a mystery until the Egyptian quartermaster general is captured and questioned; till then it has to be chalked up to the sheer witlessness of the Egyptian military leadership.

THIS is the first detailed account of the Sinai war to be published in the United States. The writer, LEO HEIMAN, who is a reserve lieutenant in the Israeli navy, accompanied the troops in the field as staff correspondent for the Israeli army weekly *Bamahaneh*, and got most of his information first-hand, checking the rest against official reports and statements. The map accompanying his article was drawn on the basis of a sketch supplied by Mr. Heiman and a map of the campaign published by Dr. J. Szapiro in Tel Aviv.

That leadership has much to answer for to the Egyptian people. Despite the speed with which the Sinai campaign was decided and the few casualties suffered by the victors, the ordinary Egyptian soldier put up a good enough fight. It was his officers corps that let him down—that same corps which presumes, with Colonel Nasser at its head, to guide the destinies of the Egyptian people. The Egyptian rank-and-filer was often ready to fight, but when, as happened again and again, he saw his officers decamp after the first few shots, he felt he had no choice but to do likewise or surrender. According to General Meir Amit, General Moshe Dayan's deputy and chief of Israeli army operations, the Egyptian army had made no real improvement over 1948: "Though their arms were now good and plentiful, the combat value of the Egyptians was in many instances even lower in 1956 than in 1948, and the conduct of their officers was beneath criticism."

The failure of the Egyptian higher command was more surprising than that of the Egyptian majors, captains, and lieutenants on the fighting lines, since all the Egyptian generals and colonels had been through European staff colleges and military academies, and had had the benefit of instruction from British, German, and Russian military experts. Captured Egyptian officers, especially the seniors among them, surprised the Israelis by their thorough familiarity with all aspects of military science. But they could apply this knowledge only on rigid, orthodox lines, were afraid to take risks, and lacked a sense for the unexpected. They could direct large-scale operations competently enough as long as everything developed in accordance with the accepted laws of military science, but were thrown into confusion and panic—and then into apathy and a fatalistic resignation—when the Israelis "threw the book away" and took chances in order to achieve surprise.

ANOTHER factor in the undoing of the Egyptians in Sinai was the very glut of arms and equipment they possessed: over-supply can mean failure of supply. At a time when the trend among modern armies is to cut down the types of weapons used by an infantry battalion to two or three for the sake of greater mobility and maneuverability, the Egyptian infantry battalion went into battle with a great number of different types of arms as well as a huge train of heavy supporting weapons, along with spares, replacements, and extra ammunition. (An American infantry battalion has from half to one-third the number of supporting weapons.) The result was that the Egyptian infantry could move only very slowly.

The picture on the Israeli side was like the positive of the Egyptian negative, with the emphasis on flexibility, daring, and mobility. The Sinai campaign was fought with highly elastic task forces whose make-up changed from day to day. One day an armored cavalry battalion would be grouped with two battalions of infantry and one of combat engineers; the next, a tank battalion would be grouped with a paratrooper unit.

The exact number of troops the Israelis put into the Sinai campaign is still a military secret, but it is known that it did not actually amount to much more than half the Egyptian total, surprising as that may seem. The rules say the attacker should possess at least a three-to-one superiority over the defender if he is to have any chance of success, but the Israelis achieved at least local superiority wherever they attacked thanks to their mobility and the reluctance of the Egyptians to stir from their fixed positions. (The few times the Egyptians did try to maneuver they bungled it.) This mobility of the Israelis was made possible by a number of diverse factors, including use of auxiliary services like conscripted buses and autos driven by their peacetime chauffeurs, but most of all by superb leadership, training, organization, and morale.

The story of the campaign itself is not easy to tell, since so many different operations were carried on at once and in so many widely separated places. The war did not start where wars usually do, at the borders between the hostile countries, but a hundred and fifty miles inside Egyptian territory, from then on zigzagging at breakneck

pace over an area of more than 30,000 square miles, with some of the main action in the final stage shifting abruptly to within a mile or two of the Israeli border.

Mitla Pass

The Sinai strike was given the code name "Operation Kadesh," after the Biblical town of Kadesh Barnea in central Sinai (whose remains were uncovered by Israeli archeologists coming in in the wake of the troops). Kadesh Barnea was where Moses had called a halt for several years during the Exodus, and some Israeli soldiers saw more than a mere coincidence in the fact that General Moshe Dayan, the Chief of Staff, who was leading the Jews back toward Egypt, bore the same name as the man who had led them out.

The grand design of Israeli strategy seems to have been first to seal off the Egyptian land approaches to southern Sinai so that the Israelis could clear the enemy from the western and eastern coasts of the peninsula without being molested in the rear. Egyptian use of the two roads out of Port Suez into Sinai, the one leading due east through Mitla Pass and the other south along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Suez, had to be interdicted immediately. Simultaneously, the Egyptian fortified bases at Quseima and Abu Aweigila all the way back to the east, near the Negev border, and Rafah and El Arish to the north, on the Mediterranean coast, were to be captured by two separate forces in order to seal off the Gaza Strip, which the Israelis intended to reduce only after it had been isolated. A fourth force was dispatched along the southernmost of the three roads across the Sinai—the Pilgrims Road running from Elath to Port Suez—to link up with the paratroopers far to the west, who were then to strike down the eastern shore of the Gulf of Suez; while still a fifth force would turn south just across the Egyptian border from Elath and go down the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba. Evidently, everything depended on speed both in traveling and in combat, and on synchronization. The paratroopers had what looked like the most dangerous assignment.

AT FIVE in the afternoon of Monday, October 29—forty minutes before dusk—

Dakota transport planes, having traveled for more than an hour from a take-off point in Israel, disgorged Israeli paratroopers one hundred and fifty miles west of the Israeli border over a place where the road from Port Suez (which is thirty miles farther west) forks to go north toward Bir Hasana and south toward El Nakhl. A medical staff and female radio operators jumped with the paratroopers. There were thirteen casualties, all either broken legs or sprained ankles. As soon as the weapons, jeeps, and supplies dropped half an hour later had been collected, the entire force proceeded through the darkness to the foothills of the gloomy mountains of the Jebel Giddi range several miles to the west, and dug in at the entrance to the narrow winding gorge of Mitla Pass, through which the road from Suez runs.

Meantime, likewise at 5 P.M., an Israeli armored cavalry task force, after a long approach march through the trackless wastes of the Southern Negev, crossed the Egyptian border in the south and attacked Kuntilla. The Egyptian battalion garrisoning the place fled after a sharp two and a half hour engagement in which it lost a hundred men in dead, wounded, and prisoners. At the same time another small Israeli task force of armored cavalry, pushing out from Elath, captured the border post of Ras el Naqb and headed west, while the force that had already taken Kuntilla swept down over a desert track on the oasis of El Themed, on the Pilgrims Road west of Ras el Naqb, and occupied it after a stiff fight at four in the morning of Tuesday the 30th. The force from Kuntilla was then joined by the force from Ras el Naqb, and at dawn the combined force moved farther west along the Pilgrims Road, where it was strafed by enemy jet planes, suffering many casualties. Nevertheless, by afternoon the Israeli armored cavalry was attacking the Egyptian fort at El Nakhl. Artillery was used by both sides, but the fort was taken in forty-five minutes. The first underground storehouses were discovered here, and the first intact Soviet-made armored cars, which were immediately pressed into service by the Israelis. At seven in the evening they were again on the way west, toward Mitla Pass, and the paratroopers.

At dawn on Tuesday the paratroopers were attacked by four British-made Vampire

jets, at about the same time that the armored cavalry was being strafed by other Egyptian planes back between El Themed and El Nakhl. At breakfast time the paratroopers were again strafed, this time by two MiG's, and a little Piper Cub plane that was about to take off with two wounded soldiers was destroyed. Another Piper Cub flew over the mountains to the west and reported back that it could see long columns of trucks, armored troop-carriers, mortars, and artillery moving from Port Suez toward the western entrance of Mitla Pass. This was the so-called Suez Brigade, which had been hastily thrown together from the Fifth and Sixth Egyptian Infantry Battalions and parts of artillery and armored regiments when the Israelis were first discovered at Mitla. The paratroopers radioed for air support, and soon Israeli jets were swooping down on the columns on the other side of the mountains. They knocked out thirty vehicles, but did not halt the Egyptians, who entered the Pass and opened a mortar duel with the paratroopers that ended only when Israeli jets attacked the Egyptian mortar emplacements with napalm bombs.

But meanwhile the Egyptian infantry had dug in among the rocks on both sides of the gorge, where neither napalm nor rockets could reach them. The paratroopers wanted to attack these positions at once, but were told to wait until they were joined by the armored cavalry on its way from El Nakhl. This force arrived at Mitla Pass at around ten that night, to be followed a little later by a transport column bringing water, food, ammunition, and some more mortars.

At dawn on Wednesday the 31st, the Israelis at Mitla were again attacked by four Vampire jets, but this time three of them were shot down by two Israeli French-made Mystère jets. Then, at noon, the paratroopers mounted the armored cavalry's half-tracks and, accompanied by light French-made AMX-13 tank destroyers, set out to clear the enemy from Mitla Pass.

THE Suez Brigade's commanding officer was above average for his army: he let the Israeli column enter the gorge without firing a shot. Only when the vehicles were deep inside and moving bumper to bumper along the narrow winding road did he order his men to open fire. The column had to

halt and, while it was immobilized, four Egyptian British-made Meteor jets came streaking down the gorge, their wing tips barely missing its rocky walls, and rained bullets into the packed column. A tank truck carrying gasoline blew up, and so did an ammunition carrier loaded with 120-mm. mortar shells, spreading destruction all around.

The two blazing wrecks blocked the road so that the column could neither go forward nor turn back. Men who left the protection of the armored vehicles to try to clear the wrecks away were hit by rifle and machine-gun bullets. And the Egyptian positions were so far up on both sides of the gorge that the muzzles of the Israeli tank-destroyer guns could not be elevated high enough to bring them under fire. The only thing to do was to charge them on foot, which is what the Israelis did, jumping out of their half-tracks and clambering from rock to rock up the steep slopes until they were close enough to use sub-machine guns, hand grenades, and bayonets. That settled the issue. Even so it took five hours, until after dark, to clear the Pass entirely. Then the column regrouped and continued through it and at dawn, on Thursday, November 1, debouched on the Suez Plains with the Canal in sight.

The Israeli paratroopers lost forty dead and a hundred wounded at Mitla. About one hundred and fifty Egyptian dead were counted, and it is probable that other dead were not discovered at all, being hidden in the rocky crevices. The road was found lined with burnt-out Egyptian vehicles almost all the way to Port Suez—the work of the Israeli planes that had pursued the retreating Suez Brigade. That same Thursday afternoon, a reserve Israeli infantry formation, with artillery and auxiliary units, arrived from Quseima to take over the Mitla Pass position.

THE paratroopers, together with the armored cavalry, now turned back through the Pass and cut southwest through the barren and forbidding mountains (some almost 9,000 feet high) of southern Sinai, following an old Bedouin caravan track. It was hard going through sand and across dry, boulder-strewn water courses, but the Israelis were helped by the Russian-made BTR armored troop-carriers they had cap-

tured, which were used to push and tow trucks over the roughest stretches.

On Friday, November 2, the column came down out of the mountains onto the shores of the Gulf of Suez at a point some twenty miles south of the entrance to the Suez Canal. There the Israelis turned left on the New Red Sea Road and rolled down to the oil town of Ras Sudr, which it entered without a fight, the town's Egyptian National Guard garrison mistaking it for a friendly force, probably because of the captured Russian troop-carriers in the Israeli van. When the error was discovered, there was a short, brisk fight in which the unprepared Egyptians lost heavily before clearing out. Ras Sudr had been built by Shell's Anglo-Egyptian Oil Company, and the paratroopers found not only cash-boxes filled with money in the company's offices, but a country club with a luxurious bar stocked with all kinds of drink. The Israelis were very thirsty, but their commander ordered them not to touch a thing, not even the club soda—"The whole Arab and the whole Communist world is against us, and America isn't for us either. We don't want to start trouble with the oil world too." All that the Israelis took from Ras Sudr was gasoline, refilling their tanks from its big filling station, which the fleeing Egyptians had left intact, as they left so much else in Sinai.

From Ras Sudr, where a unit of infantry reserves took over, the task force sped south a hundred miles on the New Red Sea Road toward the small port of Tor, which they found, when they arrived on Saturday, had already been captured by another paratroop force that had been dropped there on Friday at 3 P.M., at about the same time that Ras Sudr was being taken. At Tor, which had an airfield, the paratroopers were followed by airborne infantry along with jeeps and mortars. The two forces were now combined and, leaving another reserve infantry unit behind, traveled farther south on the New Red Sea Road all of Sunday and Monday, mopping up stray Egyptian units on the way, and arriving in Sharem es-Sheikh at the mouth of Aqaba Gulf in the early hours of Tuesday morning. There, just as the war ended, a week to the day after it had begun, they linked up with the Ninth Israeli Brigade, which had fought its way down the other side of the peninsula.

Quseima-Abu Aweigila

There was a big Coca-Cola stand with a giant red sign right at the crossroads of Quseima, which is a few miles inside Sinai from the Israeli border and about fifty miles from the Mediterranean coast. The stand was an easy landmark for Israeli pilots, who would shout over their radios: "Three rockets five hundred north of Coca-Cola!" or "Hit the bastards three-o-six east of Coca-Cola!" It is said that they deliberately spared the stand so that the Israeli infantry would be able to have a cool drink amid the heat of battle—which is just what the infantry did have, emptying every one of the hundreds of bottles in its stock.

When I arrived at the crossroads the stand and the ground all around it were littered with crates, broken bottles, bloody bandages, and pieces of paper. I have never ceased to marvel at the quantity of paper that litters battlefields, but in this case it was unusual, and all the more so because the ordinary Egyptian soldier is illiterate. Most of the paper here came from picture magazines, booklets with photographs of naked girls and pornography in general, propaganda posters and leaflets, and military instruction pamphlets. One poster was illustrated with pictures showing a bald, goat-bearded little Jew, with the Star of David on his back, crawling like a bug among other bugs and just about to be crushed under the boot of a laughing Egyptian soldier. The Arabic caption said: "*Etbakh el Yahud—Butcher the Jew!*" There were a variety of such posters and literature, all making the same point.

A young sergeant saved my life by yanking me back by my belt just as I was about to cross a ditch to investigate a pile of interesting-looking literature on the other side. The sergeant pointed to what looked like row upon row of little molehills. They were mines, and the whole roadside was sprinkled with them for yards in either direction.

According to the Armistice agreement, Egypt was permitted to station only thirty soldiers in Quseima as a guard against smugglers; minefields, armored vehicles, artillery, and any kind of fortification, including even barbed wire, were expressly forbidden. Periodical Israeli complaints about the violation of these prohibitions had been

dismissed out of hand by UN observers as not substantiated by any facts at their disposal—and even when they did investigate, they would report the same. Since the UN observers were upright men, their conduct remains a mystery, for what the Israeli troops found in Quseima, when they crossed the border on October 29, was a considerable Egyptian force composed of one artillery and two infantry battalions, a commando unit, engineers, and various supporting elements. Two 1000-foot peaks dominating the Turkish Road, which ran west from Quseima via Abu Aweigila to Ismailia on the Suez Canal, had been strongly fortified and were each manned by a battalion. Artillery and other arms were deployed high up on both sides of the road, and the lower ground and all the approaches were mined; thick rows of barbed wire enclosed the entire area.

Quseima crossroads was essential to Israeli plans because it controlled the track south through Bir Hasana to El Nakhl, and thus could be used to cut the Pilgrims Road, which was the supply and reinforcement route to the paratroopers at Mitla Pass. Two task forces, one armored and the other infantry, were sent against it. The attack opened at five in the evening of Monday, October 29, with a big but ineffectual artillery bombardment of the two peaks. At six, combat engineers went forward to cut and clear passages through the barbed wire and minefields. It took them until midnight to finish their job, and then reserve infantry units charged with fixed bayonets. The Egyptians held their fire, but sent out a commando unit, in fifteen jeeps, in a counter-attack which struck the advancing Israeli infantry from behind. Four jeeps were destroyed together with their crews, while only two Israelis were killed and several wounded, but the advance was halted. Nor could another attack at 4:30 A.M., with tanks and infantry combined, dislodge the Egyptians from their underground positions on the twin mountains. Only when air support was called for at dawn, and napalm bombs were dropped, did they break and run. Quseima was in Israeli hands by eleven Tuesday morning, but the bulk of the Egyptian force was able to retreat in good order to Abu Aweigila, where they swelled the garrison already there to five thousand.

AT NOON the same day—while infantry reserves were being sent in buses to join the paratroopers a hundred miles to the west at Mitla Pass—the armored task force that had taken Quseima went on to Abu Aweigila over a twenty-five-mile stretch of the Turkish Road that had to be cleared of mines, and all of whose bridges, culverts, and ducts had been blown up by the retreating Egyptians, together with long stretches of the road surface itself. Yet the Israelis reached, and were attacking, the outer defenses of Abu Aweigila by that same afternoon. The secret underground pipeline that brought drinking water to Abu Aweigila from wells at Quseima was immediately found and cut. This was to have an important effect.

Abu Aweigila, the new main depot and supply base of the Egyptians in Sinai, was defended by four main strongpoints, each of which was armed with from forty to sixty field and anti-tank cannon and held by a battalion. This resulted in the strongest artillery concentration of the war; a gun was waiting for every Israeli tank. The first Israeli objective was the strongpoint at the crossroads, but their attack, mounted hurriedly on the afternoon of their arrival in hopes of achieving a surprise, was repelled with heavy losses, five half-tracks and two tanks being crippled. Although the tanks were salvaged and repaired that night, it was decided to abandon any idea of another frontal attack and to try to find some way of going around the crossroads. Scouts were sent out and soon found a camel caravan track through Daika Pass, to the west, which detoured around the crossroads; the Pass had been left undefended because the Egyptians believed it impassable for vehicles. Almost immediately another frontal attack was feinted at the crossroads strongpoint, while the entire Israeli armored task force, circling wide, made its way into the Pass under cover of darkness. Considerable help was needed from the engineers and other service units to negotiate it, but the vanguard of the armor got to the other side of the Egyptian position by Wednesday dawn.

Without waiting for the main column to catch up, the first tanks attacked the crossroads strongpoint from the rear at 6:30 A.M., daybreak, and overran it. A counter-attacking Egyptian armored battalion, riding in

American-made Sherman tanks and British-made Archer-Valentine armored assault cannon, was virtually annihilated in a short but violent clash, and by noon the Israeli task force had regrouped and was ready for the next strongpoint. This one, called the Egyptian Dam, was dug into the foundations of a giant dam built when Sinai was under British military government. It had been left unused by the Egyptians, and now served them only as a fortification. It was defended by sixty cannon and dozens of heavy mortars.

Attacking the Egyptian Dam on Wednesday afternoon, the Israeli tanks ran into a deadly barrage. Many were crippled or burnt out, others bogged down in the soft sand. Their crews abandoned them to fight on foot with hand grenades and burp-guns through a battle that raged without lull or interruption for another five hours. The Egyptians resisted stoutly, and only at eight in the evening did they finally stop firing; those that did not surrender fled.

Leaving a combined infantry-artillery task force to deal with the two other strongpoints at Abu Aweigila, the Israeli armor regrouped during the night, and by next morning, Thursday, November 1, was on the way west along the Turkish Road toward Bir Rod Salem, where air reconnaissance had reported the so-called Russian Brigade to be massing.

Nasser had sent this powerful force out from Ismailia to relieve Abu Aweigila and recapture Quseima, both of which were important to him because they lay on the most direct route between Israel and Egypt. It was called the Russian Brigade because it was equipped entirely with Russian-bought tanks and vehicles, had been organized by Russian officers—and, there is some reason to believe, was still partly commanded by them. It had about a hundred T-34 tanks, thirty 100-mm. armored assault guns, over a hundred armored cars and troop-carriers, and around two hundred other vehicles.

THIS formidable force was intercepted by Israeli planes shortly after leaving Ismailia and punished by them all the way to Bir Gafgafa, which is a little to the southwest of Bir Rod Salem and on the other side of the Turkish Road. There, the harassed commander of the Russian Brigade decided

to halt and deploy for battle, influenced by the fact that there were huge quantities of Russian T-34 fuel stored in underground tanks nearby, as well as by the nature of the terrain, which was flat and open, and thus would be unpropitious to the favorite Israeli tactics of concealment and surprise, and permit the Egyptians to make the most of their heavier Russian guns and armor. The Israeli jets and fighter-bombers were making movement by day almost impossible anyhow, and rather than move by night and expose his force to an ambush, the commander decided to sit down and wait for the enemy on a site of his own choosing.

The Israelis came on Friday afternoon, November 2, and hit head on. The battle lasted for several hours, with the initiative in Israeli hands throughout. The Egyptian commander made a few tactical mistakes insofar as he failed to protect his flanks adequately, but the struggle was finally decided at dusk by the intervention of Israeli aircraft, which knocked out over a dozen T-34's. About a dozen more T-34's and armored assault guns were disposed of by the Israeli Sherman tanks and AMX-13 light tanks; both of these, when handled with skill, proved to be more than a match for the heavier, and newer, tanks and assault guns opposing them. (It was during this battle of armor that the Israelis say they heard Russian over the enemy's field radios—mostly in the form of oaths and uncomplimentary epithets directed at the Egyptians by their "instructors.")

Saturday dawn, the 3rd, the Israelis crossed the Turkish Road and entered Bir Rod Salem, where a big new air base stocked with Russian jet fuel was captured intact. From there they sighted Lake Timsah and Ismailia on the Canal.

Back at Abu Aweigila the battle for its two remaining strongpoints, Umm Shiha and Umm Kategg, had continued meanwhile, with the thirsty and desperate Egyptians fighting fiercely in the belief that the Russian Brigade would at any moment break through to relieve them. But lack of water and constant shelling and bombing finally did their work, and at Friday noon, the 2nd, an Egyptian lieutenant colonel surrendered with a few of his men, the rest having fled into the desert. Huge amounts of booty were found in the underground storehouses

at Abu Aweigila, including Russian-made weapons still in their crates.

Rafah-El Arish

Rafah is at the northeast corner of the Sinai Desert, on the Mediterranean coast, and forms part of the western base of the Gaza Strip. Sinai's single railroad and the Via Maris coastal highway pass through it, as do two secondary tracks from the south. The Sinai and Gaza Egyptian army groups were linked up at Rafah, whose military stores as well as pivotal position made it of central importance for any Egyptian offensive against Israel. The Fifth Reinforced Brigade, a crack Egyptian outfit, was entrenched outside the town, along with two armored and four artillery battalions and numerous auxiliary units.

The Israeli forces put into the attack against this place were hand picked and composed of regulars only; they amounted to an infantry task force larger than a brigade and a brigade-size armored task force. The senior infantry officers had already seen action at Rafah back in the first days of 1949, when Rafah Junction was almost taken by the Israelis, before they had to retreat in the face of Anglo-American intervention.

The Egyptians were emplaced on three hills each of which was held by a battalion, with artillery and reserves concentrated at Rafah Junction proper. The hills were girdled by double minefields and triple rows of barbed wire, and the positions themselves, deep underground, were protected by reinforced concrete and sandbags, and armed with machine guns and anti-tank cannon. Snipers were dug in on the hill slopes. The artillery was emplaced on Russian lines, with guns zoned on their fields of fire, and every possible angle of fire and target within range minutely calculated in advance. There was no need of forward observers, and even at night all the Egyptian commander had to do in order to bring a designated spot under fire was lift his phone.

On the eve of the attack, the Egyptian commander, Colonel el Abed, received a personal message from Nasser asking him to hold Rafah at all cost. It was plain that a conventional frontal attack on Rafah was out of the question. The Israelis enjoyed a slight numerical superiority, but nowhere

near the minimum of four to one necessary for an attack on such a position. Anyhow, to attack Rafah frontally without suffering prohibitive losses would require days of preparatory air and artillery bombardment, and only twelve hours had been allotted to the capture of the place. In hopes of exploiting Israeli skill and daring, it was decided to attack at night, and with infantry alone—without armored support. Tanks were to attack only at dawn, after the enemy defenses had been breached. H-Hour was set for 8 P.M., Wednesday, October 31, the third day of the campaign.

On the night of October 30, twenty-four hours before jump-off time, combat engineers crawled up to the forward Egyptian positions, cut through the barbed wire, and started clearing passages through the minefields. Three passages were partially cleared before the engineers were discovered by Egyptian sentries, and forced to retreat under withering fire leaving their work incomplete. On top of that, the enemy had been alerted as to the direction of the forthcoming attack. The Israeli commander decided, nevertheless, to attack as planned; time was too valuable to waste on any change of plans. Meanwhile, two of the cleared passages had been mined anew by the Egyptians, but not the partially cleared middle passage, where all they did was steal a dead Israeli sergeant's effects. Still, the Egyptians now knew what to expect and where, and soon they brought up two powerful anti-aircraft searchlights with which they began sweeping the front.

The first Israeli attack was launched on schedule, at eight in the evening, with infantry in armored half-tracks. Two half-tracks that were in the lead blew up on mines, blocking the narrow passages behind them. The rest of the attackers, blinded by the glare of the enemy searchlights and under artillery fire, dug in on the spot instead of continuing uphill. Israeli artillery now came into play, but did little damage to the deep Egyptian dugouts. Air support, too, was called for, and the enemy was rocketed, bombed, and strafed from midnight till two in the morning.

When the planes departed, the armored infantry went in again. This time the driver of the leading Israeli half-track was hit and, losing control of his steering wheel, side-

swiped a mine. The explosion turned the half-track at right angles to its course, so that it blocked the narrow passage through the barbed wire. Abandoning the other half-tracks, the infantry got past the wrecked vehicle on foot and threaded their way through the minefields under heavy fire.

THE young lieutenant colonel in command of the battalion advancing against the middle hill of the Rafah defenses realized that the artillery fire coming his way was timed and targeted in advance, and that it was essential to get through it in a hurry. Going uphill on the double, his battalion was brought up short by barbed wire which the engineers had failed to cut the night before. By using Bangalore torpedoes, they blew up one row, but were unable to cut through the entire width of the second row. At this point Private Tuvia Anshel, eighteen years and from Acre, put his hands over his face to shield his eyes and threw himself full length across the coils of wire, with the shout: "Step over me, boys!" Which they did, jumping from Tuvia's back into the clear and racing towards the Egyptians.

It was the turning point of the battle. The enemy leapt out of their dugouts and fled, with the Israelis close behind, firing burp-guns and throwing grenades. The Egyptian artillery crews fled too, leaving their pieces undamaged—and still hot from all the shells they had kept on pouring into their pre-arranged fields of fire long after the Israeli infantry had crossed these and was attacking the Egyptian infantry at close quarters. Without artillery support and completely surrounded, the two other hills surrendered before dawn, though some isolated pockets of resistance were still being cleaned out five hours later.

At dawn, Israeli tanks and half-tracks swept past the hill fortresses and fanned out over the ground behind them, overrunning Rafah Camps one after another and capturing Rafah Junction a little after 9 A.M. with a battalion of Super-Sherman tanks. Then the Israeli armor turned and raced west toward El Arish, thirty-two miles away, which was Egyptian army headquarters in Sinai. Its air base and fortifications were taken that same morning of Friday, November 2, with the town proper (population 20,000) surrendering to General Laskov,

Commanding General of the Israeli Armored Forces, at noon. Panic had been spread in El Arish by Egyptian officers fleeing there from Rafah with tales of the destruction wrought by huge Jewish forces armed with hundreds of heavy tanks and secret weapons. Hearing this, the officers of the garrison at El Arish deployed their troops in prepared defensive positions and then decamped westward "to fetch reinforcements." The abandoned troops fled or surrendered as soon as they saw the first clouds of dust raised by the Israeli armor on the horizon. Two new British-made mobile Marconi radar stations were captured at El Arish, as well as two Czech-made scouting planes, some wrecked MiG jets, underground fuel stores, and huge undamaged ordinance and quartermaster's supply depots.

Heading west from El Arish along the Via Maris, the Israeli armor was attacked by the so-called German Brigade, the creation of former Nazi General Farnbacher and the unofficial German military mission to Egypt he had headed from 1950 to 1954. This crack unit was the first armored brigade the Egyptian army had formed, and was outfitted with Sherman tanks, Archer-Valentine armored assault guns, Bren troop-carriers, and armed jeeps. Nasser had sent it east on the Via Maris road to recapture El Arish, persuaded perhaps by the boasts his commanders in Sinai and Gaza had been radioing to Cairo headquarters during the hours they had held out in their various fortifications, that the Israelis were on the point of exhaustion and could be dislodged almost everywhere by one strong push from a good armored force.

The backbone of the German Brigade was broken by an air attack, and the Israeli armor finished the job. Only a small part of the Brigade ever got back to Egypt, and most of those who did went on foot through the desert. The Israeli armor sped on to the outskirts of Qantara, almost a hundred miles to the west and within sight of the Canal, on Saturday, the 3rd. It was only now, after the destruction of his two best armored brigades, that Nasser gave Sinai up as lost and ordered the Egyptian forces remaining there to withdraw to the west side of the Canal. But by then they were all on the run anyway.

Israeli casualties in the Rafah-El Arish

battles were about sixty dead and a few hundred wounded. The Egyptians had at least seven hundred killed and fifteen hundred taken prisoner. As for Private Tuvia Anshel, he is back with his outfit after a brief stay in the hospital, where he had his bruised and torn body and a bullet wound in his leg patched up. The only obvious mark his experience has left on this pale, slight young man is an occasional stutter due to shell-shock. And that, he says, is preferable to having met death in front of barbed wire, waiting like a "dumb cow."

Gaza-Sharem es-Sheikh

The capture of Rafah sealed the fate of the Gaza Strip, but the Egyptian general commanding the Gaza army group still hoped for UN intervention. On Thursday night, November 1, American destroyers and transports anchored off Gaza port to evacuate American citizens and UN personnel. Senior Egyptian officers asked to be taken along and wept openly on the beach when refused. Later, they confessed to their Israeli captors that they had been less afraid of being taken prisoner by them than of being lynched by the Arab refugees from Palestine in the Gaza Strip, who appear to hate Egyptians almost as much as Jews.

Gaza town was attacked on Friday morning, the 2nd, by a task force of Israeli infantry reserves supported by an armored task force and several light special-assault groups. Simultaneously, a smaller infantry task force made up of farmers from the nearby Negev settlements attacked Deir el Ballah, a few miles north of Gaza, which was defended by a battalion of the Egyptian National Guard. When it fell, as it did quickly, over two hundred machine guns were found in the deserted Egyptian positions, which was an enormous number for a battalion.

Gaza itself was defended by the Palestine Brigade and the Fedayeen Brigade, supported by artillery and mortars. The main Egyptian position here was Hill 88, a mile outside Gaza, also known as Hill Sheikh Ali Muntar after an Arab chieftain buried there. This hill, fortified by the Turks, had cost General Allenby's troops a thousand casualties to take in the First World War, and a bitter battle had been fought for it in 1948. The Armistice agreement had left it just within the Egyptian lines, towering over the

Israeli settlement of Nahal Oz, and for eight years gunfire and raiders had issued from it to harry the Israelis roundabout.

After a preliminary bombardment by heavy mortars in the early morning hours of Friday, armored Israeli infantry drove their half-tracks up Hill 88 and straight through the barbed wire into the Egyptian positions, where a fight at close quarters took place that ended with the annihilation of the defenders. Having occupied the hill with infantry reserves brought up in conscripted buses, the Israelis sent tank-infantry teams toward Gaza. These stormed two smaller, company-held strongpoints on the way, and entered the town from the south after a wide sweep behind the enemy lines.

The column of half-tracks leading the way into Gaza was nearing the railroad station when it was suddenly fired on from windows and rooftops. Sherman tanks coming up from behind saved the situation by blasting the houses on both sides of the street, and the advance continued to the British-built Gaza police fortress, where the *fedayeen*, fearing the worst if captured, had barricaded themselves. Many of them were killed in the ensuing fight, but four hundred survivors gave themselves up at 9 A.M., and another four hundred *fedayeen* were flushed from the various holes and refugee camps in which they were hiding.

At noon Gaza was formally surrendered. Khan Yunis, to the southwest toward Rafah, held out for another twelve hours. The Egyptians had concentrated most of their artillery at Khan Yunis, which was the headquarters of their Gaza army group, and the artillery duel there on Friday was the fiercest of the war. But the Egyptian guns were silenced at last by the heavier, French-made 155-mm. howitzers of the Israelis, and early on Saturday the 3rd, a combined infantry and armor attack broke through Khan Yunis's last defenses.

THE final and perhaps most important blow of the Sinai campaign was delivered by the Ninth Infantry Brigade of the Israeli army, a reserve force made up of Galilee farmers and Haifa clerks, of grocers, businessmen, and workers. Its assignment was to proceed down the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba and attack the Egyptian bases at its mouth that had been preventing the

passage of ships to and from the Israeli port of Elath. Mobilized on October 26, the Ninth Brigade was rushed south to Beer-sheba the following day in some three hundred civilian trucks, jeeps, vans, and power wagons, accompanied by armored half-tracks and artillery tow trucks. The column was twelve miles long. All Sunday and Monday the Brigade lay hidden in a big canyon close to the Egyptian border. Enemy planes spotted and tried to bomb it on Monday night, but failed to do any damage. Tuesday morning, the Brigade left the canyon and by the same night it was in Kuntilla.

At Kuntilla the Ninth Brigade turned due south on a rough desert track and by the next morning, Wednesday, October 31, it had reached Ras el Naqb thirty miles away and just across the border from Elath. Here the track ended, but Colonel Abraham Yaffe, the Brigade's commander, decided to push straight south across the mountainous wastes of southern Sinai, which were crossed only by a few paths, rather than make the long detour of five hundred miles through Themed, Nakhl, Ras Sudr, and Tor that keeping to roads would require.

During the next three days the Brigade averaged about a mile an hour, and in many cases even less. Most of the time the soldiers walked alongside their vehicles and helped haul them over rocks and boulders and out of drifting sand. Radiators boiled over and tires were torn by flinty rock. The engineers and other special service men performed miracles, blasting a way through stone and rescuing stranded vehicles with tractors. In the end only nine out of the three hundred vehicles in the column had to be left behind, after being stripped of all their vital parts.

SATURDAY, November 3, the Brigade sighted the Gulf of Aqaba as it was approaching the oasis of Dahab. At Dahab itself, camel-riding Egyptian coastal guards ambushed a reconnaissance unit and killed four Israelis, but were severely punished in return and had to abandon the place. Israeli naval craft landed fuel, water, ammunition, and other supplies at Dahab on Saturday night, and then the Brigade pushed on to the oasis of Naqb. A few miles farther south was a fortified Egyptian military base, with airfield and coastal batteries, at Ras Nasrani at the mouth of the Gulf of

Aqaba, opposite the islands of Tiran and Sanafir, whence the Egyptians had for the past few years been harassing Israeli shipping on its way in and out. Naqb was taken on Sunday afternoon after a sharp skirmish with the camel corps' rear-guard. Meanwhile Ras Nasrani had been under attack by Israeli bombers since Friday, and at the approach of the Ninth Brigade its commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Hana Naguib (no relative of General Mohammed Naguib, Nasser's predecessor as Egyptian military dictator) decided to evacuate the place and retire to Sharem es-Sheikh, where there was a deep-water harbor and help might be expected from the Egyptian navy. A small entrenched rear-guard was left behind whose stubborn resistance held up the Israeli entrance into Ras Nasrani for a while; it surrendered on Monday the 4th, only after being shelled with heavy mortars, and after the Egyptian soldiers—so they themselves said—had killed their commanding officer "because he was crazy," had treated them like dogs, and wanted them to fight till death.

That night the Ninth Brigade, dog-tired after its desert and mountain trek, deployed for an attack on Sharem es-Sheikh. The entire Egyptian Red Sea Force—one infantry battalion with supporting arms, base troops, and two coastal artillery batteries—held the place. Tuesday, at two-thirty in the morning, half-tracks were sent along the beach, making a lot of noise and raising clouds of dust, to feint an attack on the Egyptian right flank while an infantry battalion tried to deliver a stealthy thrust against the left. The Egyptians did not fall for the ruse. To be sure, they had in the dark mistaken the half-tracks on the beach for tanks, but had felt certain their powerful artillery would be able to take care of tanks too. Moreover, they were on the alert for surprise attacks, and spotting the attack on their left flank early, they halted it with the fire from dozens of 81-mm. mortars. The Israelis brought up 120-mm. mortars to knock these out, which was done soon enough, but a second attack was repulsed too, this time by the fire of the Egyptian field pieces.

Now it was the Ninth Brigade's turn to call for air support, and at dawn twelve Mustangs swooped in and worked over the Egyptian batteries with napalm bombs and rockets, knocking every one of them out.

(The planes did not do their job unscathed; several were downed by anti-aircraft fire.) Minutes later, the Israeli infantry and half-tracks rushed forward and overran the first two lines of the Egyptian positions before the defenders could recover from the shock of the air bombardment. This decided the battle, and by 8:30 A.M. Israeli half-tracks and jeeps had swept into Sharem es-Sheikh and captured its airfield and harbor. At nine Lieutenant Colonel Naguib surrendered with the remnants of his troops.

Naguib's superior, Colonel Raouf Mahpuz, commander of the Red Sea Force, was discovered in a luxurious bunker dug under a mountain top as far back from the fighting positions as was feasible. The bunker was mahogany-paneled, fluorescent-lit, and air-conditioned, had a big refrigerator and shelves lined with books. The colonel was found dressed in his best uniform, smoking a Craven-A cigarette, and standing amid six pigskin suitcases packed with his personal belongings. He turned over the keys to headquarters cash-boxes to his captors and asked for a receipt for the money in them.

At 9:30 A.M. forward units of the Ninth Brigade met forward units of the armored paratrooper task force coming around the point of Sinai Peninsula from Tor. The war was over.

Total Israeli casualties in the Red Sea campaign were ten killed and forty wounded. It was a feat mainly of endurance and technical capacity, combined with planning and organization, rather than of fighting. Nine hundred prisoners, including forty-two officers, were taken. Of the two Egyptian naval craft at Sharem es-Sheikh, one, the *Aida*, an armed transport, was sunk by Israeli air attack off the coastal oasis of Naqb, while the other, a frigate, was sunk by a British cruiser, HMS *Newfoundland*, when she dashed for refuge toward Port Suez.

Naval and Air War

With its six destroyers, six frigates, four submarines, and forty other miscellaneous craft, Egypt's navy was three times the size of Israel's at the beginning of the Sinai campaign. At the same time the Israeli navy did not have a single boat in the Red Sea. But the Egyptian navy did not try to exploit its superiority, and the only initiative it took was the foolish one of sending a lone de-

stroyer against Haifa in a hit-and run night raid. Of the one hundred sixty shells which that destroyer, the *Ibrahim el Awal*, fired at Haifa from 3:30 A.M. on, October 31, not a single one hit shore.

A bitter dispute is still on between the Israeli navy and air force as to which was responsible for crippling the *Ibrahim el Awal*, but it does seem that her engine room and steering gear were already out of commission by the time four French-made Ouragan jets began strafing her at dawn. That had, at any rate, an important psychological effect, for it was then that her crew began to jump overboard, and that her captain, Lieutenant Commander Hassan Rushdi Tammuzin, felt himself compelled to surrender the ship. He tried to sink her first, but Israeli sailors got on board in time to close the sea cocks. When boarded, the *Ibrahim el Awal* still had three hundred shells left per gun, and her guns themselves were all intact. Apparently, the morale of the Egyptian navy was even lower than that of the Egyptian army. (In the meantime, the captured destroyer has been repaired and put back into commission as part of the Israeli navy.)

Other Israeli naval operations during the campaign included escort of merchant ships, patrolling of harbors and coasts, fire support for the ground forces at El Arish, Rafah, Khan Yunis, and Gaza, and—most important of all—the establishment of a flotilla in the Red Sea. This was a little epic in itself, but the time to tell that story in full is not yet here.

THAT the real overlord of the Sinai campaign was the Israeli air force cannot be disputed. Its record and the decisiveness everywhere of its intervention were such as to persuade Prime Minister Ben Gurion to give it top priority from now on and to increase its strength with all speed.

Sinai provided the first battle test for the as yet untried French Mystère jets, and they passed it brilliantly, showing themselves superior to the Russian MiGs. Even one of Israel's older-type jets, an Ouragan, likewise French-made, brought down a MiG—though this may be more to the pilot's than to the machine's credit.

Jets also turned out to be almost ideal tank-destroying and ground-support weapons

in the Sinai war, thus exploding one of the biggest myths of the Korean war, which had it that jet planes were too fast for effective use against relatively small targets on the ground. The fact, moreover, that nine of Israel's propellered Mustangs were downed by enemy anti-aircraft, while only two of her jets suffered the same fate, now makes the piston-driven plane seem obsolete as a ground-support arm on the score of vulnerability alone.

The little Piper Cubs proved more valuable than big bombers in the Sinai fighting. They landed on and took off from mountain tops, canyon bottoms, dry riverbeds, and desert tracks; they flew observation missions, delivered messages and mail, evacuated wounded, and carried senior officers from one point to another on the fighting fronts. Transport planes, too, were made much use of to drop paratroops and deliver arms, ammunition, and supplies. And that the Israeli air force's mechanics and technicians on the ground did so well in the matter of salvaging and repairing planes, as well as keeping them functioning, was another source of satisfaction to the Israeli high command.

The Israeli air force lost thirteen planes in all in the Sinai campaign: nine Mustangs, two Piper Cubs, one Ouragan, and one Mystère. Except for one of the Piper Cubs, which was downed by two Egyptian MiGs at Mitla Pass, these planes were all victims of anti-aircraft fire met while making ground attacks. Only four of the thirteen pilots shot down died; one was wounded and captured, and the rest managed to return to the Israeli lines. Moreover, six of the planes knocked out were able to crash-land, and were repaired and put back into service; four others were recovered and cannibalized for spare parts; only three were a total loss.

All the Egyptian planes downed (two—unverified—MiG-17's, six MiG-15's, and four Vampire jets) were downed in air combat, and none of their pilots seem to have survived. For one thing, the MiG-15 does not have an ejection seat, and its pilot faces destruction along with his plane if he cannot crash-land. No wonder the Egyptian MiG-15's were not eager to let themselves in for air combat, even when they outnumbered the Israeli Mystères facing them by three or four to one. The first news the world at large got that the Russians were providing the

Egyptians with MiG-17's was when an Israeli pilot saw the pilot of a plane he had crippled bail out by an ejection seat, which the MiG-17, an improvement on the MiG-15 of Korean war vintage, does have. The fact that the Russians are known now to be supplying the Egyptians with MiG-17's in quantity, while still withholding them from their satellites in East Europe, speaks eloquently for the priority Egypt has in Moscow's plans for the future.

Conclusions and Review

In addition to the equipment captured, the Israelis destroyed one hundred twenty Egyptian combat vehicles, three hundred motor transports, one ship, and one hundred artillery pieces. Since the total number of Egyptians met in the Sinai war was between thirty thousand and forty thousand, and only about eleven thousand can now be accounted for as captured or killed, between twenty and thirty thousand Egyptian troops must have escaped back to Egypt. General Dayan claims that the Israeli army was not interested in acquiring multitudes of prisoners whose keep would put a further burden on Israel's overstrained economy. But now that the defeated Sinai troops are being organized by Nasser in camps near Cairo and Alexandria into new formations and re-armed with Soviet aid, one may have second thoughts about having let so many of them escape.

Total Israeli losses in the short war were one hundred seventy killed, over six hundred wounded, and about a dozen missing (the Egyptians admit that they have four Israeli prisoners of war, one of them a wounded pilot). The disproportion between these and the Egyptian losses (almost five thousand dead) speaks for the overwhelming Israeli superiority in the ability to concentrate firepower, and for the desire of the Israeli command to keep casualties down even in the face of the necessity for speed. Realizing how essential it was to the Israeli plans to adhere to a schedule and how much those plans depended on the careful, exact timing, synchronization, and meshing of operations scattered over an area of 30,000 square miles, one is left with nothing but admiration for the Israeli army's staff work and for the capacity of the ordinary Israeli soldier to carry out his assignments.

OPINION in Israel is still divided on whether the Anglo-French intervention helped or hindered her army in Sinai. One side maintains that it helped by destroying the Egyptian air force and keeping the Egyptian navy bottled up in Alexandria harbor. The other side claims that it saved Nasser from total defeat at the hands of the Israelis, who would otherwise have occupied the Suez Canal and crushed the rest of the Egyptian army. This is the view General Dayan seems to take. He went on record with the statement that the Anglo-French intervention shortened the war by one day and saved Israel many casualties from air attacks at home, but that it hardly affected the outcome of the war, which had already been settled before the Anglo-French came in, Israel having achieved air and naval superiority in the first two days of fighting. General Dayan declared, moreover, that, far from throwing her entire war potential against the Egyptians, Israel had used only operational forces, without having to call on her tactical or strategic reserves; and that Syria and Jordan could have been dealt with at the same time had they attacked.

Early in November I went out on the Turkish Road to watch Ismailia being bombed by the British. The last Israeli road-block was then at Kilometer 10—that is ten kilometers, or about six or seven miles, out of Ismailia. Two light machine guns, their darkly glistening barrels pointed to the west, were resting on captured Egyptian army blankets spread over the sand, and soldiers were heating cans of captured Sudanese corned beef over a fire of gasoline-soaked sand. Two young girls in uniform, radio operators, were combing the sand out of their hair.

That night a young lieutenant led a strictly unofficial patrol down to the Suez Canal and came back at daybreak with several canteens of Canal water, which he gave to the two girl radio operators for their morning ablutions.

Revisiting the Turkish Road three weeks later, I found the most advanced Israeli road-block now at Kilometer 50. But this time I could not see any road west of it. Where was it, I asked the officer in charge. He grunted and pointed over his shoulder to a point on the road behind us, where a demolition party was working.